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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA UNITED, MODERATE FOLLOWING GREEK VETO IN
BUCHAREST

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Macedonia's leaders, media and intellectuals responded to Greece's decision April 3 to block Macedonia's NATO accession with deep disappointment, but couched in moderate and sober statements. Emotional appeals for national unity and perseverance in implementing reforms have been the main GOM public messages post-Bucharest. High-level USG support before and at Bucharest has helped to moderate the negative reaction of the public here, producing in its wake a surge in pro-U.S. sentiment across the board. End summary.

DISAPPOINTED IN GREECE...CALLING FOR UNITY AND REFORMS

¶2. (SBU) Macedonia's bid for NATO membership at the Bucharest Summit became the Number One news item on April 3 when the final decision regarding the A-3 countries was taken. Electronic media and wire services provided minute-by-minute coverage of the summit, where all 26 Allies acknowledged Macedonia's readiness to join, but Greece blocked Macedonia's invitation due to the bilateral name dispute. Well-known Macedonian pundits analyzed Macedonia's situation post-Bucharest, disappointed in Greece's "19th century rhetoric," yet appealing to citizens "to avoid a self-isolationist scenario." Although they considered the veto's "negative effect on the citizens," analysts urged from the pages of the April 4 print media against "a payback policy against the Greeks."

¶3. (SBU) Following the official veto announcement at Bucharest, Macedonia's leaders decided to return immediately to Skopje "to be with the Macedonian people in this difficult moment." Visibly emotional, both President Crvenkovski and Prime Minister Gruevski expressed their frustration with Greece's veto, which they considered a clear breach of the 1995 Interim Agreement (Note: The Interim Agreement between Macedonia and Greece committed the two countries to the UN process for resolving the name issue, while giving assurances to Macedonia that Greece would not block its accession to international organizations under the provisional name "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." End note.) Crvenkovski added, however, that "our disappointment should not paralyze us." Condemning Greece's "short-sighted policy," political leaders of all stripes here said what

Macedonia needed most now was a state strategy supported by a unified political and ethnic consensus.

ETHNIC ALBANIAN REACTIONS

¶4. (SBU) Unhappy with the Bucharest results, Post's eAlbanian contacts echoed the government's appeals for unity and pledged to avoid "provocations and further inter-ethnic polarization." Musa Xhaferi, VP of the biggest eAlbanian party DUI, gave a sober analysis of the situation. According to him, Macedonian institutions now faced a choice: isolation as "FYROM" abroad and "Republic of Macedonia" internally, or acknowledgement of the fact that the name issue is a real obstacle that eventually must be overcome. Xhaferi added that Macedonia should not walk away from its determination to continue reforms for the good of the people. DUI VP Teuta Arifi told us April 4 that Albania's successful NATO bid, and the release of Kosovo Albanian ICTY indictee Ramush Haradinaj, counter-balanced the disappointment of the eAlbanian community in Macedonia.

THE U.S. IS OUR BEST ALLY

¶5. (SBU) Macedonia's leaders across the political spectrum thanked all NATO allies, especially the U.S., for acknowledging Macedonia's successful reforms. PM Gruevski added that even Greece did not disagree with that positive assessment and pledged to "continue with our reforms and programs." The momentary disappointment at Bucharest gave way to the media touting of President Bush's alleged support for "a closer U.S.-Macedonia relationship." The country's leaders assessed that the explicit USG support for Macedonia was the main reason why the public had reacted calmly to the

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bad news from Bucharest. The follow-up Zagreb meeting between POTUS and Macedonia's top leadership only reconfirmed for the Macedonians that, according to the widest circulation daily "Dnevnik," "with the U.S. on its side, Macedonia has its most powerful ally ever in history."

STOCK MARKET DIPS... BUT BUSINESSES AREN'T WORRIED

¶6. (SBU) Media reported that, "due to the fiasco in Bucharest," the Macedonian stock exchange index marked a record drop of 8.4% on April 3. Although that caused short-term panic among stock market investors, most economic analysts predicted that "business will continue as usual," and the index went back up the next day. The local British Business Group issued a statement on April 3 that British businesses "will not be deterred by the lack of a NATO invitation, because Macedonia fulfilled all the objective criteria."

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) Across the political and social strata, Macedonian reactions post-Bucharest have been moderate and responsible. The push by the USG to show clear support for Macedonia's candidacy was a major factor in the country's equanimous acceptance of a very disappointing NATO summit outcome. USG support has encouraged the government to pledge continuing much-needed reforms, while also creating a surge of pro-U.S. sentiment.
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